

Status of Japanese Women: Career-Mindedness of University Graduates

— Problems in the Compatibility of Profession and Home —

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In this paper an attempt is made to review some of the studies concerning the career-mindedness or compatibility of profession and home on the part of the educated Japanese women in the light of the changing socio-cultural milieu. In order to understand some of the problems peculiar to Japanese society, first of all a short analysis will be made regarding the social status of women in the prewar and postwar Japanese society.

I The Social Status of Women in the Prewar Japan

It is widely known that the social status of Japanese women until the end of World War II was extremely low. The subservient status and role of Japanese women had been rigidly prescribed and maintained in the feudalistic social structure. Submissiveness traditionally regarded as the utmost virtue for women had persisted through the Meiji Restoration to the modernized Japanese society. This "submissiveness" is often called "submissiveness of the three stages in life". That is, the Japanese woman is expected first to obey her father, then after marriage to obey her husband, and finally in her widowhood to obey her eldest son. Even at the time of birth girl babies were less welcomed than boy babies. In education girls and women were discriminated and ignored. When married, women were expected to occupy an inferior position to men. Legally speaking, women were considered as "incompetent" without legal right or ability. At the same time working women were very often looked down upon as unusual.

However, it must be noted that before the feudal system came into existence, Japanese women had enjoyed a position of political and social importance. As Edwin Reischauer aptly describes:

Japanese women, who in the earliest times had enjoyed a position

of social and political dominance over men, gradually sank to a status of complete subservience to them. Their rights and influence in early feudal society seem still to have been considerable, but in time even these rights were lost, as the women of Japan become socially and intellectually mere handmaids of the dominant male population.*

It is obvious that there existed a distinctive and fixed division of labor by sex in Japanese society. The relationship between male and female was, so to speak, vertical: the male superiority over the female with the women's role set in the home to bear and raise a child while the man's as breadwinner. This distinction was based upon a fallacy that women are biologically and physically weaker than men; therefore they are intellectually not so competent as men.

II The Social Status of Women in the Postwar Japan

The termination of World War II made an epoch in the history of Japanese women. The promulgation of the new Japanese Constitution made women equal with men before the law. A few instances recounted here shows the remarkable progress achieved by the Japanese women after the war. In 1946 at the first post-war general election 39 women were elected to the Houses of Representatives and in the following year 10 women were elected to the House of Councillors. Although their number decreased at the time of the second election, there were in 1949, 12 in the House of Representatives and 11 in the House of Councillors. For the past twenty-five years the number of women Diet members has stayed almost constant.

* Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan, Past and Present* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1946) p. 22

Table 1 The Number of Women Diet Members

House of Representatives

Year	1946	1947	1949	1952	1953	1955	1958	1960	1963	1967	1969
No. of Women	39	15	12	9	9	8	11	7	7	7	8

House of Councillors

Year	1947	1950	1953	1956	1959	1962	1965	1968	
No. of Women	11	12	15	15	13	17	17	13	

Source: *Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Women Suffrage*
A History of Women through Pictures and Graphs
 Women's and Minors' Bureau, 1971.

The Fundamental Law of Education was enacted in 1947 to equalize educational opportunities by introducing coeducation at all levels and shifting schools to a 6-3-3-4 "single-track" system. The length of compulsory education was extended from 6 to 9 years. The doors to public educational institutions were open to women. In 1973 the girls' rate to advance to senior high school went up to 89.4%, and that to junior colleges and universities to 31.2%.

Equal educational opportunities regardless of sex have been guaranteed in principle, but if we examine carefully, women's education is still treated separately and often ignored. For instance, in 1973, 261,790 women are attending junior colleges but 94% of them are in privately supported ones. Little efforts have been made by the Government to establish public junior colleges to provide women with equal educational opportunities. This means only daughters from well-to-do families can afford to go to junior colleges preventing the others from receiving higher education. On the other hand, in 1962 many government-supported technical colleges came into existence mainly for men and there were 60 in 1969.

There has been a strange resurgence of the traditional pattern of women's education, that is, good-wife-and-wise-mother education. Starting in 1973 senior high school curriculum was officially changed to include home-making as a required subject for girls. Many parents prefer to send daughters to private senior high schools and colleges rather than to public, coeducational institutions so that their daughters become feminine without much emphasis upon academic aspect.

III Summaries of Some of the Exploratory Studies

A) Women's Higher Education, Occupation and Home

Institute for Democratic Education, 1961.

This is a report based upon 2071 replies from those women aged 25 to 55 who graduated from higher educational institutions, married and have had a profession. I am one of the four writers who completed this exploratory study. Those 2071 respondents are graduates of 25 colleges and universities all over Japan. Some of the findings are as follows:

- 1) The degree of satisfaction from the two-track life has no relation to the type of the family composition. However, those living with a husband feel happier in their two-track life than those without.
- 2) Two groups, one which feels extremely happy with the two-track life and the other which wants to quit the job as soon as possible, are compared. The former seems to enjoy their job, while the latter is more pressed with economic needs.
- 3) Whether they have a domestic help or not seems to be related to the success of the two-track life.
- 4) Junior high school teachers and medical doctors seem to get less satisfaction from the double-track life than artists, specialists or researchers.
- 5) The respondents put greater value upon psychological cooperation of the family members and planned living than electrification of home-chores in order to maintain the double-track life successfully.
- 6) What supports the double-track life is not a technical matter but related to her aims and ideals of life reflected in the selection of her husband or job.
- 7) One of the greatest obstacles which hamper the two-track life is to have small children. The problems related to the traditional Japanese child-rearing practices and mother-child relationship are to be re-examined in terms of compatibility of home and profession.

- 8) How to keep equilibrium between family and professional life can be reviewed in terms of roles of each individual in the family. Mother-wife roles should be adjusted or shared by other members of the family and the like. Unless expectations are met, conflicts may arise. Therefore in terms of mutual understanding and adjustment nuclear, homogeneous family may make it easier to carry out a two-track life though there may arise new problems.
- 9) Distorted social image influenced by the feudalistic ideas concerning the woman's occupation, complicated human relations of the place of work, shortage of time, boring work are some of the deadlocks which interrupt the compatibility of home and profession.
- 10) In the Japanese social structure it is extremely difficult for mothers to get re-employed by the kind of institutions at which they desire to work after a few years of absence. Nevertheless, 67.4% of those who are not working indicate their wish to get re-employed. This is no longer a personal problem but a social problem which needs some solutions collectively.
- 11) To have more day-care centers established ranks first for the purpose of maintaining a two-track life. There are many complaints concerning discriminatory treatments given to women: too early retirement age applied only to women, no equal pay, no important positions assigned to women, etc.
- 12) As to the prevailing opinion, "Women, return home from work," only 10.4% is in favor and 70.7% is opposed. Among various professions doctors rank lowest and researchers rank highest in opposing to it. It is insisted by many respondents that women should make extra efforts to make a double-track life possible.

B) What Women Students Think — Their Academic Work, Profession and Marriage

JAUW 1963

This exploratory study was conducted under my responsibility by the Japanese Association of University Women in 1961. The subjects are 1,910 seniors in 10 coeducational universities and 8 women's colleges in Tokyo and Kansai areas. The valid returns were 70% numbering 1,328. Some of the findings are as follows:

- 1) Three-fourth of the subjects wants to work after graduation, but only 1/4 wishes to continue regardless of marriage or children.
- 2) Those who consider occupation as a stop-gap (until marriage or child-birth) are 27.4%, while those who wish to quit with the child-birth but to get re-employed after the children have grown up are 25.8%.
- 3) There exists a difference between seniors in national universities and private ones. There are fewer stop-gap-oriented students and more career-oriented ones in national universities than in private ones.
- 4) When mothers are working, daughters tend to wish to maintain a career as well. The study reveals that there exists a significant difference between the two groups: one with mothers working and the other not.
- 5) The ambiguous attitude toward their future which occupies 1/4 of the subjects may reflect the changing social conditions which can hardly be met by the present university curricula.

C) A Survey of University Women Graduates — How They Utilize Their Abilities JAUW, 1969

This survey was conducted in 1969 by the Japanese Association of University Women. The sample consists of 4,466 women graduates from 13 colleges and universities, both women's and coeducational. The actual return of the questionnaire was 42% (1,881 persons). Some of the findings can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Out of 1,881 women, those who continued working were only 20.4%, though 43% of 1,881 women have had some work experience.
 - 2) The average length of work experience is between 4 and 6 years.
 - 3) The main reasons for discontinuing the job are marriage, child-birth and child-rearing.
 - 4) Almost half of those who have continued working are not married.
 - 5) If we compare graduates from private women's colleges and those from national coeducational universities as to continuation of work, the former is only 14.3% while the latter 57.7%.
 - 6) As to the desire to work again only 20% of them wish to do so.
- D) A Study on Japanese Women Doctors and Role Conflict – Problems in the Co-existence of Profession and Family
by Wendy Smith, November 1972.
(unpublished thesis for the degree of B.A.)

This survey was conducted, under my supervision, by Miss Wendy Smith, a student from Monash University, Australia. This research is based upon a questionnaire survey of 60 women doctors in two quite distinct areas in Tokyo, downtown and outer suburbs and the prefectural capital of Gunma. The sample consists entirely of those who are married, or have been married and have children. Only doctors in private practice were selected, although a few others who are running large hospitals alone, or with their husbands, are included.

The reason why those practising at home are selected is that medicine is one of the few professions where this common location of job and family life is a possible alternative to employment outside the home.

The major findings are as follows:

- 1) In the case where the medical profession is a generational family practice, the two sets of roles become effectively *one* with reference to the norms of the group "medical family" and thus problems of management are diminished.

- 2) When no such reference group is available, the roles must be managed with reference to a different group, that is, a group of "women doctors."
- 3) There are three main techniques for role management in terms of time and energy conservation — compartmentalization, delegation and elimination of role obligations. The "medical family" group manages through the delegation of the roles of mother and doctor to other members within the co-operative family group. Some compartmentalization takes place as to the role of wife with the full understanding of the husband. The "women doctors" group compartmentalizes these roles relying on limitable forms of medical practice and using maids and even dish-washers, but not all aspects of housework or child-care. Elimination of the medical role altogether by discontinuing practice for several years is characteristic of this group, while the group of medical family shows less incidence of the elimination of the medical role because of the comparative ease of role management for them.
- 4) Doctors in private practice are likely to remain a vital field for women doctors as long as Japanese society continues to lack institutions which will permit complete compartmentalization of the functionally specific roles of wife, mother and physician.
- 5) The status of "doctor" occupies the fifth place in the status hierarchy. Women doctors with such high status could be seen as agents of potential change in the status of women in Japanese society. They could exercise or suppress this potential in their choice of methods for solving role conflict.

IV Concluding Remarks

Industrialization brings about an increase of woman labor force. Japan is no exception. At present approximately 20,000,000 women are engaged in some kind of work. Those gainfully employed amount to 10,480,000 persons, an increase of 6,180,000 persons for the past fifteen years. Nearly half of them are married. The ratio of their average salary in comparison to men's is 48.5 to 100. The difference between women's salary and men's becomes greater with age; for instance, for those aged 40 — 49 get 41.9 with men's salary as 100. The increase of woman labor is mainly in the categories of unskilled or semi-skilled. In 1969 women in the administrative and managerial category are only 4% of the workers in the same category, an increase of 1.5% in ten years. In other words, it is not an over-statement to say that Japan's unprecedented economic growth has been mostly achieved at the sacrifice of cheap woman labor, as was so in the silk industry in the Meiji and Taisho eras. This is why a great increase of woman labor does not always elevate the woman's status in society; instead, at a certain developmental stage of industrialization it seems that the woman's status becomes stagnant or goes down.

At the same time, emergence of a great number of nuclear families is also a concomitant phenomenon brought about by industrialization and urbanization. The average family size which was 5.08 persons in 1930 became 3.73 in 1970. Under such condition unless institutional care and protection are guaranteed it is extremely difficult for mothers to keep working.

Since more than half of the employed women are married, compatibility of work and home is no longer a choice but a necessity. A small increase in the occupational categories of administrative and professional work implies varied difficulties and obstacles encountered by the educated women. It is hard to change expected behavior of women unless serious consideration is given to educational innovations at all levels in terms of objectives, program and curriculum to meet the changing societal presses and demands upon women.

Table 2 The Number of Women Workers (employed)

Classification \ Year	1955	1969
Agriculture and forestry	310,000	100,000
Fishery	30,000	20,000
Mining	60,000	30,000
Construction	200,000	430,000
Manufacturing	1,930,000	3,770,000
Sales, banking, etc.	1,120,000	3,020,000
Transportation and communication	200,000	400,000
Service	1,270,000	2,470,000
Governmental affairs	190,000	240,000

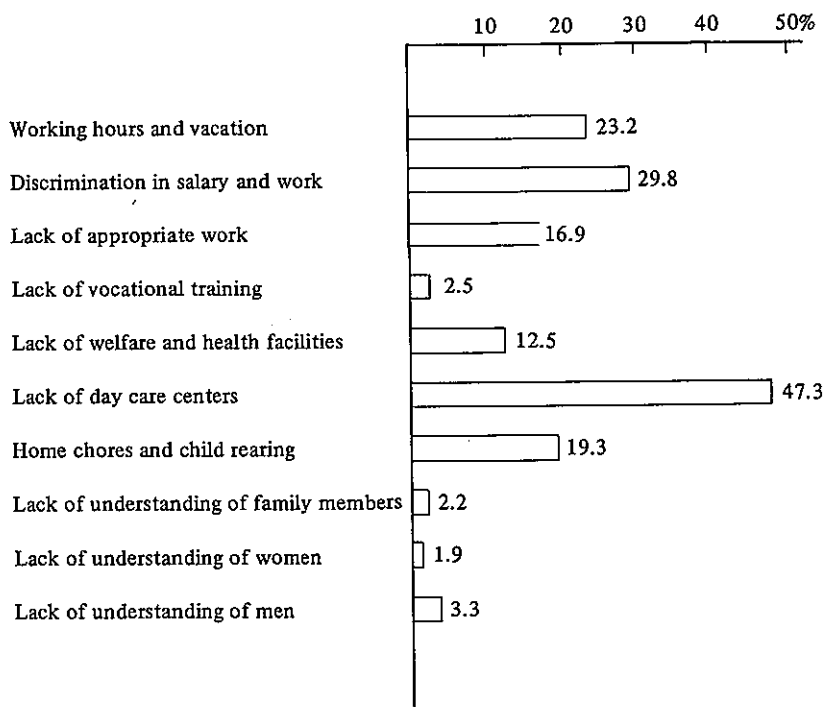
Source: Prime Minister's Office, 1969

Table 3 Trends of Employed Women in Marital Status

Year	Total	Unmarried	Married (with husband)	Husband deceased or divorced
1955	100.0 %	64.7	20.9	14.4
1960	100.0	62.4	25.0	12.6
1970	100.0	48.3	41.4	10.3
1972	100.0	43.4	46.1	10.4

Source: 1) Prime Minister's Office, *Census* 1955-1970
 2) Prime Minister's Office, *Survey on Labor Force* 1972

**Fig. 1 Conditions which need to be improved
in order for women to work**



Source: Prime Minister's Office,
Survey on Women's Consciousness 1973. (Employed and married women)

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